

Analyze Your Discourse Communities

According to Dr. Zemliansky, a *discourse community* is a group of people that share common interests and who discuss topics important to the group. Before you begin any research project, it is important to understand your discourse community, because this will lead you to the most appropriate places to conduct your research and will help you speak to your audience in a language they understand and relate to. Complete this activity, adapted from Dr. Zemliansky's "Chapter 6." Use any academic resources that you can find on the Internet, in your home, or in any library with which you are affiliated. Thousands of references are available online, either in full or in part. If you need help getting started, try the sources listed in The Saylor Foundation's "[Online Resources for Professional and Academic Research Papers](#)" worksheet (PDF).

List all intellectual and discourse communities to which you belong. Then, consider the following questions:

1. What topics of discussion, issues, problems, or concerns keep these communities together? And what constitutes new knowledge for your group? Is it created experimentally, through discussion, or through a combination of these two and other methods?
2. How would you characterize the kinds of language which each of these communities use? Is it formal, informal, complex, simple, and so on? How are the community's reasons for existence you listed in the first question reflected in their language?
3. When you entered into the community, did you have to change your discourse, both oral and written, in any way, to be accepted and to participate in the discussions of the community?
4. Does your community or group produce any written documents? These may include books, professional journals, newsletters, and other documents. What is the purpose of those documents, their intended audience, and the language that they use? How different are these documents from one community to the next?
5. How often does a community you belong to come into contact with other intellectual and discourse groups? What kinds of conversations take place? How are conflicts and disagreements negotiated and resolved? How does each group adjust its discourse to hear the other side and be heard by it?

